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'Taking Care of' the Other, Cultivating the Self: The Ethics of Social Interaction

This paper explores how Muslim Belgian women fashion their ethical self in relation to their community. Lara Deeb analyzes piety as a relational trajectory, whereby the pious subject depends on a commitment to community betterment (Deeb: 2006). While the subject of relational piety has been the focus of previous studies (Fernando 2014, Deeb 2006, Mittermaier 2014) the multiple and complex forms of how it emerges as an ethical commitment is yet to be explored. This paper looks at the nuances in relational piety in the context of Belgian Muslim women's volunteering practices. It examines how volunteering provides a space for these women to be moral role models to others. This is a complicated process whereby the 'other' can refer to Muslims as well as non-Muslims. This paper examines how the volunteers interact with non-Muslims in the context of relational care ethics. It suggests that being a 'role model' is a dual process during which the women cultivate their own ethical self through the relational process with non-Muslims. This point comes back to Jouili's description of representational *da'wa*, which entails 'self discipline' and the cultivation of the self in terms of good qualities to provide a blue print for others in terms of living morally (Jouili 2014: 140). The paper is part of a larger research project, for which interviews and participant observation were conducted with Muslim Belgian women between the years 2013 and 2016. The fieldwork was carried out in the Belgian cities of Brussels and Antwerp.

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I hold a BA in Sociology and English Literature from the Istanbul Fatih University, Turkey. I obtained my MA Degree in Social and Cultural Anthropology from the Belgian KU Leuven. I am currently a PhD candidate (2013–2017) at the University of Leuven, Belgium. Specifically, my ethnography-based research focuses on Belgian Muslim women of Turkish descent and their volunteering practices. I examine how volunteering is part of their ethical self-cultivation and in turn how an ethical consciousness informs their volunteering practices, leading to a dual process. My broader research interests include transnational social movements and their local formations, the spiritual economy, ethical selfhood, ethnicity and migration, gender and subjectivity.